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Written statement* submitted by Amuta for NGO Responsibility, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Proposed Guidelines for Foreign Government Funding to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs

The European Union and its member states, as well as Norway and Switzerland, claim that upholding and promoting universal values such as human rights and democracy are central to their foreign policies. In order to advance these values, Europe provides extensive funding to civil society organizations that are active on these issues, including to groups outside of Europe.

This mechanism has resulted in the transfer of very large sums to a narrow spectrum of highly politicized Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, on a unique scale, which raises many difficult issues that must be addressed. Much of the European state funding for NGOs takes place with very limited transparency, accountability, or due diligence. In many instances, support is provided for activities and organizations that are inconsistent with Europe's declared values and objectives, and are closely linked to anti-peace campaigns of demonization and boycotts. This external funding ostensibly for "civil" society creates reactions that lead to conflict, and also impinges uniquely on Israeli sovereignty and the democratic process.

Hundreds of millions of Euros, kroner, pounds, and francs in European state funding are provided to fringe organizations to oppose government policies on some of the most contentious issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Foreign state funding to similar NGOs in Europe, for instance to support Basque separatists in Spain, abortion activists in Ireland, or ending laicite in France would not be tolerated. When the European Union provided a limited amount of funding to the American Bar Association for research on the death penalty, the resulting reports were replete with disclaimers that the funding was not intended in any way to challenge US laws or policies. Both the EU and the ABA were well aware that financial support by the EU for such lobbying would have caused a political firestorm in the United States.

These issues are now a major part of the political discussion in Israel, including proposed legislation to oversee foreign government funding to Israeli NGOs mainly via increased transparency measures. Europeans have also injected themselves into this debate by providing financing to NGOs lobbying against the legislation, issuing hysterical letters bemoaning the end of democracy, and threatening consequences to bi-lateral ties. These activities are marred by severe double standards. The European Union for instance claims that increasing transparency is a central component of good governance, yet condemn efforts to enhance it in Israel. When Austria passed a law banning foreign funding to mosques and Muslim NGOs (far more draconian than anything proposed by Israeli politicians), there was no outcry by European officials, opeds or letters, or threats to Austria's standing.

Instead of secret funding and circumventing diplomatic channels, Europe should work with Israel's Knesset to address these issues jointly and reach understandings as to what is appropriate in foreign funding for civil society. This will be strengthen their shared democratic values, advance constructive dialogue, and promote human rights in a manner consistent with the foreign policy of European governments.

Recommendations for European government funding guidelines:

Principles

1. No funding for NGOs involved in antisemitism

The Amuta's research project, NGO Monitor, has published many examples of (directly and indirectly) European-funded NGOs and their officials promoting blatant antisemitism. The Palestinian group BADIL, funded by the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat (budget via Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Denmark), publishes blatantly antisemitic caricatures. This NGO has received indirect funds from the EU, Denmark, and Ireland. Sabeel (which receives funds from the Netherlands and Sweden indirectly), regularly publishes antisemitic content.

2. No funding for NGOs involved in terrorism/terrorism supporters/terrorist affiliated staff

European governments and the EU maintain lists of "designated terrorist groups," such as Hamas, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Libation of Palestine (PFLP). Despite this, European governments fund NGOs that have alleged ties to these terrorist groups. For instance, the director of Palestinian group Al-Haq is allegedly a member of the PFLP. The Israeli High Court of Justice has described him as "Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde" – a human rights worker by day, a terrorist by night. Addameer (a Palestinian NGO funded by the Secretariat) also has alleged links to the PFLP. Other NGOs, such as the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), legitimize Palestinian terror attacks against civilians by labeling them "resistance."

3. No funding for organizations that deny Israel's right to define itself as a Jewish state, that promote one-state frameworks, or support "right of return" claims for millions of refugee descendants

Europe has consistently supported "two states" as the framework for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. In sharp contrast, there are numerous examples of funding to NGOs that deny Israel's right to exist within any borders and/or call for the implementation of a Palestinian "right of return" into Israel. Israeli group Zochrot (indirectly funded by Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, and others) supports a "right of return", and calls for a "de-zionized" Israel in which Jews will become a "minority." Most Palestinian groups also support these demands, and almost all of them call for the implementation of a so-called "right of return".

4. No funding for NGOs involved in BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaigns

The EU and European states have consistently asserted that they oppose boycotts of Israel. At the same time, they fund many NGOs that promote BDS. These NGOs not only target Israeli businesses, but European companies as well. BDS has tried to destroy (some cases successfully) many initiatives to foster Israeli and Palestinian co-existence and projects aimed at improving Palestinian health and economy. The NGOs also intend to disrupt mutually beneficial trade and economic ties between Israel and Europe. Almost all European-funded Palestinian NGOs are signatories to the 2005 call for BDS. For instance, Al-Mezan (funded by the Secretariat, Ireland, Norway, the EU, and others) called for boycotting the G4S security company due to its business ties with Israel. Israeli group "Who Profits" (indirectly funded by the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, and others) is the primary database for BDS campaigns against foreign and Israeli banks, security companies, and various other firms. It also assists BDS activists with identifying new "targets" for their campaigns.

5. No funding for NGOs promoting anti-Israel lawfare

Lawfare is the exploitation of courts, quasi-judicial frameworks, and legal language as political warfare to prolong conflict and prevent peaceful reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. The European-funded Palestinian (and international) NGOs leading this anti-peace campaign (including Al-Haq, Al-Mezan, Al-Dameer, and PCHR) file cases in various countries demanding the arrest and indictment of Israeli officials. In recent years, following the acceptance of "Palestine" to the International Criminal Court (ICC), there has been an intensification of lawfare efforts. These cases deliberately mask links to terror groups, are based on distorted and often invented interpretations of international law, and are aimed at restricting Israel's ability to prevent terrorism and attacks on civilians. These campaigns have direct ramifications on western countries combating terrorism, including the US and its NATO allies in Europe, which are facing similar dilemmas and problems (i.e. the use of human shields, embedding munitions and military positions among civilian populations, highly organized propaganda). While lawfare may begin with anti-Israel radicals, the results of these activities will ultimately hamper the ability to confront ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and other terror groups, leading to far greater carnage and conflict in the future.